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PAGE

1

Study shows need for roadway improvement

Public meeting set

PAGE

2

Map of project study area

Frequently asked questions

PAGE

3

Continued public involvement key during EIS phase

PAGE

4

Study schedule

Meeting invitation

## Study: Roadway improvement needed

*WisDOT moves to prepare Environmental Impact Statement*

Last fall, the Wisconsin Department of Transportation and engineering-consulting firm HNTB Corporation began studying a 10-mile stretch of U.S. 12 in the Fort Atkinson area to see if a need for improvements existed.

For many years, transportation planners had been considering options for the corridor. WisDOT officials decided the first step toward an improvement option would be to determine if a need to do something actually existed. The U.S. Highway 12 Needs Assessment Study was initiated in March 2001 to identify what long-term transportation problems existed along the corridor.

The study began as a broad look at existing and future travel conditions in the area, and it included high levels of public involvement.

A traffic needs analysis showed how the increased volume of traffic along the corridor is causing safety and congestion problems, which are expected to intensify over time. Data and input collected from urban and



*A sign, right, warns drivers against opening their car doors into traffic on Main Street in Fort Atkinson.*

**INSIDE:** A closer look at the Environmental Impact Statement

rural residents via a telephone survey and in focus group meetings showed that drivers who experienced these problems were concerned about them.

From the needs assessment study, three primary reasons to begin looking at improvement options for the U.S. 12 corridor surfaced:

- Regional mobility demands.
- Safety and congestion problems.
- Public support for improvements.

### Regional mobility demands

An origin-destination survey conducted in 2001 found:

- More than 3,000 vehicles would utilize a U.S. 12 bypass south of Fort Atkinson if it were in place today.
- Almost 500 of those vehicles would be heavy trucks.

### Safety and congestion problems

The traffic needs analysis showed many of the streets that make up U.S. 12 within Fort Atkinson are expected to have traffic volumes approaching roadway capacity limitations by 2030.

*Continued, Page 2*

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## Oct. 10 public information meeting scheduled

The public is invited to attend an informational meeting that will address the U.S. Highway 12 study. The meeting will be conducted in an open-house format. Wisconsin Department of Transportation project officials will be available to answer questions and collect comment forms.

**Public Information Meeting**

Thursday, Oct. 10, 2002

7 to 9 p.m.

Fort Atkinson High School  
925 Lexington Blvd., Fort Atkinson

## Continued from Page 1

Intersections that are expected to have low service levels or an increase safety problems include:

- Madison Avenue and Robert Street
- North Third and Main streets
- Sherman and Main streets
- Milwaukee Avenue and Main Street
- South Third and Main streets
- Janesville Avenue and South Third Street
- Rockwell and Whitewater avenues

## Public support for improvements

The telephone survey, which was conducted among 400 area residents by the St. Norbert College Survey Center last fall, indicated strong agreement among respondents that there are safety and congestion problems on U.S. 12.

According to the survey findings:

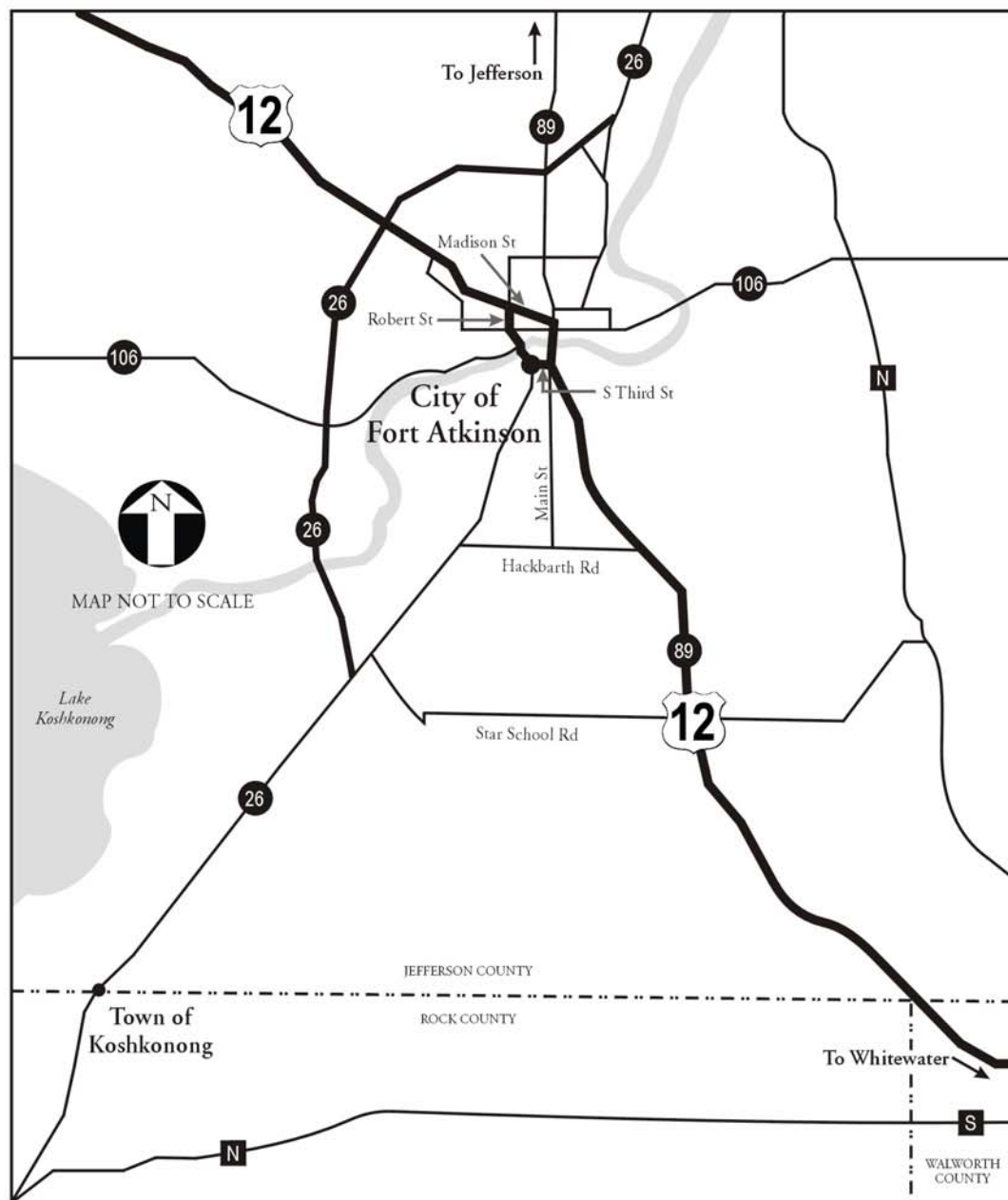
- About 80 percent of respondents agreed there were safety problems along the corridor.
- About 70 percent of respondents agreed there was congestion along the corridor.
- About 50 percent of respondents said congestion was getting worse along the corridor.

Resolutions passed in Fort Atkinson and the town of Koshkonong also supported a need to look for solutions to these problems.

WisDOT is now in the process of preparing an Environmental Impact Statement, or EIS, which will outline the purpose and need for improvement, possible construction alternatives and their respective environmental consequences, and the comments collected thus far from residents and agency officials.

The first version of the document, the Draft EIS, is scheduled for publication at the end of 2003. The Final EIS is slated for publication in summer 2004.

## Study area



## WisDOT shares frequently asked questions

During the U.S. Highway 12 Needs Assessment Study, which was conducted during the past year, WisDOT met with citizens and public officials during an extensive public involvement process. Many questions were asked and answered. Here are some of the more frequently asked questions.

*Why do you say the public supports further study of U.S. 12?*

Public participation was very important during the needs assessment. WisDOT officials hosted two public information meetings. Two focus groups, which also met twice, provided officials with local input and

perspective. Also, the St. Norbert College Survey Center conducted a telephone survey among city and town residents. Throughout the process, the message was clear: There are problems that need to be fixed along the existing corridor in both urban and rural sections.



# Public involvement at forefront of EIS process

An Environmental Impact Statement, or EIS, is the "decision document" for a potential major highway project such as the U.S. 12 study. The EIS pulls together the interests and concerns of surrounding communities and involved agencies, and it recommends a future course of action.

The National and Wisconsin Environmental Policy acts require that an EIS be prepared for transportation projects that could have significant effects on the quality of the natural and human environment. Elements studied for an EIS include natural resources; air and noise impacts; traffic and land access; and social, cultural and economic aspects. EIS documents are prepared according to state or federal requirements, depending on how the project is funded.

The U.S. 12 study specifically identifies the need to find solutions to increased traffic. A traffic needs analysis completed by WisDOT in fall 2001 shows that the increased volume of traffic along the U.S. 12 corridor causes safety and congestion problems that are expected to intensify over time.

A survey conducted last year among residents along the corridor found drivers who experienced these problems were concerned about them.



*Traffic collects at the intersection of Lexington Boulevard and Madison Avenue in Fort Atkinson.*

The main contents of an EIS are:

- Purpose and need for the proposed action.
- Project alternatives.
- Environmental consequences.
- Public and agency comments.

The first version of the EIS, or the Draft EIS, explains the "no-action" alternative for a project, as well as possible "build" alternatives and their impacts. The U.S. 12 study Draft EIS is scheduled for publication at the end of 2003. It will be sent to public officials and relevant agencies, and it will be available for the public to view at the

WisDOT Transportation District 1 office in Madison, and at town and city halls and libraries in the study area. The Draft EIS is available for public viewing during a minimum 45-day period, when citizens may review the document and send their comments to WisDOT. A public hearing is also held during this period to give citizens the chance to express their comments directly to WisDOT officials. A public hearing on the U.S. 12 Draft EIS is scheduled for spring 2004.

The Final EIS is prepared after the public hearing and review period.

The Final EIS recommends an alternative and the reasons for its selection, and it includes public and agency comments and mitigation measures. The Final EIS for the U.S. 12 study is slated for publication in summer 2004.

At least 30 days must pass after the Final EIS is published before a Record of Decision -- the Federal Highway Administration's final approval -- can be made. The Record of Decision is needed before a recommended action may proceed to final design and construction.

## Continued from Page 2

Public participation will also be at the forefront of the Environmental Impact Statement, or EIS, process as solutions to those problems are explored. WisDOT will ask Fort Atkinson, the chamber of commerce, Koshkonong, and the Friends of Koshkonong U.S. Highway 12 Committee for representatives to join a study oversight committee. This committee will review EIS progress and continue to provide local perspective.

*After the needs assessment was completed, Fort Atkinson approved a Northwest Quadrant Plan. The plan prohibits "big-box" retail outlets such as Home Depot and Wal-Mart and encourages traditional residential developments for the area west of WIS 26. How will this new land-use plan affect traffic projections?*

The needs assessment analysis did not include high-intensity commercial development west of WIS 26 in its traffic projections.

At the time the needs assessment was conducted, the approved land-use plan for the area indicated industrial development west of the highway, which typically generates fewer trips than big-box commercial development. The revised city plan will be considered in the EIS.

*Why can't the safety and congestion problems be fixed without building a bypass?*

Improving the existing system will

be one of the options studied in the EIS. Officials do have some operational changes slated for implementation along parts of the corridor in Fort Atkinson through 2005. Although some of these changes will likely ease operational problems experienced on the roadway, through-trip drivers will continue to experience the same delays and potentially dangerous situations including awkward parking maneuvers, pedestrian activities and lane changes.

# Study time line

	2002					2003												2004										
	Aug.	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	April	May	June	July	Aug.	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	April	May	June	July	Aug.	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.
Consensus-building meetings held																												
Data collected / environmental constraints																												
Public information meeting																												
Traffic and land-use studies conducted																												
Reconstruction alternatives identified																												
Public information meeting No. 2																												
Reconstruction alternatives refined																												
Public information meeting No. 3																												
Draft EIS reviewed, published																												
Public hearing on EIS held																												
Public issues addressed / final EIS published																												
Record of Decision published																												

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U.S. HIGHWAY 12



NEEDS ASSESSMENT



## YOU'RE INVITED

### to the U.S. Highway 12 Environmental Impact Statement

## Public Information Meeting

**Date:** Thursday, Oct. 10, 2002

**Time:** 7 to 9 p.m.

**Place:** Fort Atkinson High School,  
925 Lexington Blvd., Fort Atkinson

Study Team members will be on hand to answer questions.